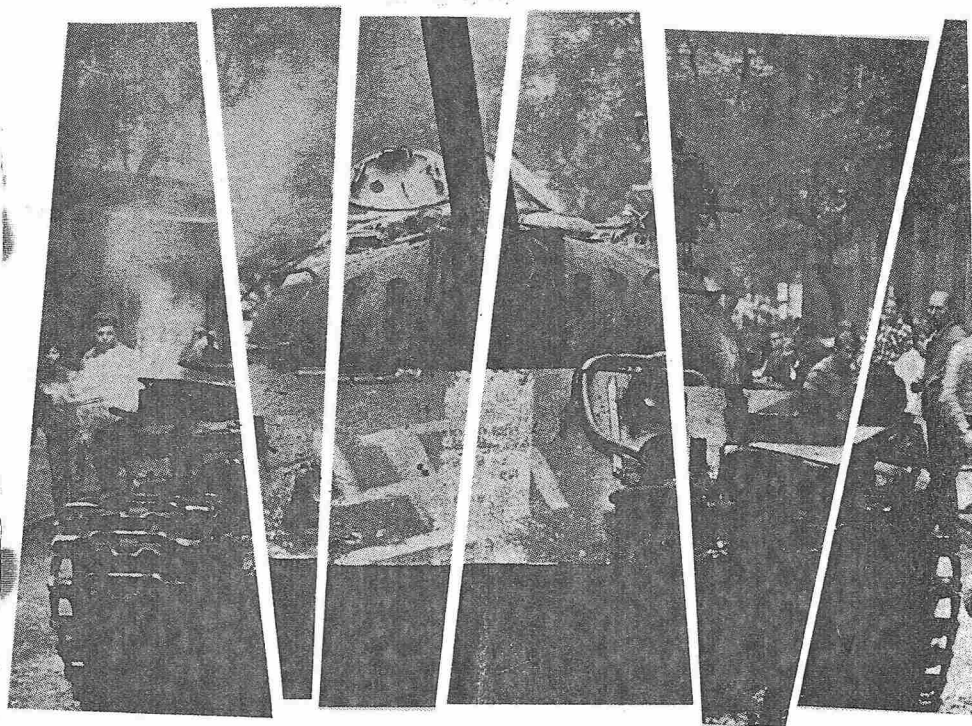


THE INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

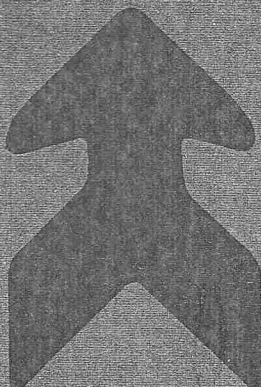


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By Joseph Hansen

**August 23, 1968 / APPEARANCE
OF
MAJOR
FIDEL CASTRO**

analyzing events in Czechoslovakia



**APPEARANCE OF MAJOR FIDEL
CASTRO RUZ, PRIME MINISTER OF
THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT
AND FIRST SECRETARY OF THE
CENTRAL COMMITTEE
OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CUBA,
ANALYZING EVENTS IN
CZECHOSLOVAKIA, FRIDAY,
AUGUST 23, 1968, YEAR OF THE
HEROIC GUERRILLA.**

**(Translation of the transcript made by the
Revolutionary Government's Department
of Stenographic Transcriptions.)**

On the invasion of Czechoslovakia

(by the Russian Soviet Union in 1968) Published by Merit Publishers (SWP) New York

Fidel Castro's Position

By Joseph Hansen *(veteran theoretical leader of the Socialist Workers Party-USA –ed.)* 1

What has happened to Fidel Castro's speech of August 23 in which he supported the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact countries? *(those Eastern European countries within the Russian Soviet orbit as a result of occupation by the Soviet Red Army which sealed the defeat of Fascist Germany in 1945 –Web ed.)*

Is it being hailed by Moscow? Has the Soviet command tried to put a copy in the hands of every citizen of Czechoslovakia, the better to explain why foreign troops have been stationed in their country? Have the Czechoslovak communications media opened a public discussion of the questions it raises?

If the speech is not being widely circulated, has it at least been placed on the agenda for discussion at a governmental level, or among the leaders of the Communist parties of the "socialist camp"?

The truth is that even the Communist Party, U. S. A., one of the few pro-Moscow parties in the West to support the invasion wholeheartedly, has displayed an ambiguous attitude toward Castro's speech. While utilizing the fact that Castro approved the action of the Warsaw Pact countries, the top CPUSA leaders have refrained from disseminating or discussing Castro's speech as a whole.

The silence over what Castro said — one might justifiably call it a conspiracy of silence — is all the stranger in view of the fact that the Cuban leader remains the only one of all those who backed the action of the Warsaw Pact governments whose position can be characterized as internally consistent, if you accept the basic premise advanced by the Kremlin *(the Moscow administrative centre of Soviet Russia –ed.)* to justify sending troops into Czechoslovakia.

What led the Warsaw Pact allies to decide to block Castro's contribution from being discussed on a broad basis? Why did they decide that it was politically discreet to ignore it? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine Castro's arguments closely.

Castro's Basic Premise

The Cuban leader states his basic premise as follows: (all quotations are from the official translation released by the Cuban government.)

"We . . . were convinced — and this is very important — that the Czechoslovak regime was dangerously inclined toward a substantial change in the system. In short, we were convinced that the Czechoslovak regime was heading toward capitalism and was inexorably heading toward imperialism. Of that we did not have the slightest doubt."

Castro, of course, is referring to the regime of Alexander Dubcek although he does not refer once to Dubcek by name.

The reasons advanced by Castro for coming to this conclusion include the interest displayed by imperialism in the ferment in Czechoslovakia, a certain responsiveness by some circles in the country to this interest, the slogans that were advanced concerning democratization of the political structure, the pressure for establishment of freedom of the press, "a process of seizure of the principal information media by the reactionary elements" which began "to develop," "a whole series of slogans of open rapprochement toward capitalist concepts and theses and of rapprochement towards the West."

He agrees that not everything was bad about the situation. Some of the slogans were "unquestionably correct." He also agrees that responsibility for precipitating a situation so allegedly favorable to the restoration of capitalism must be ascribed to the previous (Novotny) regime, to "incorrect methods of government, bureaucratic policy, separation from the masses . . ." Various "tendencies were developing simultaneously, some of which justified the change and others of which turned that change toward an openly reactionary policy."

It should be noted that Castro does not contend that the counterrevolution had reached the point of launching an armed struggle for power. It was the Dubcek regime itself that was in question, that was "dangerously inclined toward a substantial change in the system." Castro says at another point: "Provisionally, we reached this conclusion: we had no doubt that the political situation in Czechoslovakia was deteriorating and going downhill on its way back to capitalism and that it was inexorably going to fall into the arms of imperialism."

I do not propose to argue here whether Czechoslovakia was going downhill and on its way back to capitalism. The accumulating evidence more and more confirms the opposite view — that a political revolution was maturing in Czechoslovakia which, if Moscow had not intervened, would have succeeded in bringing a revolutionary socialist regime to power.

Justifies Violation of Sovereignty

On the basis of his premise, that "Czechoslovakia was moving toward a counterrevolutionary situation, toward capitalism and into the arms of imperialism" (which, of course, coincides with the justification advanced by the Kremlin for intervening with troops), Fidel Castro considers one of the main bits of propaganda used by the Warsaw Pact allies at the time to explain what they had done. They said they had received an appeal from prominent Communists in Czechoslovakia asking them to intervene. Out of international solidarity, they had responded to this request.

Castro notes that the names of the signers of the appeal had not been made public up to the time he spoke. However, he does not make much of that; he goes to the heart of the question.

The intervention, in his opinion, "unquestionably entailed a violation of legal principles and international norms." It "cannot be denied," he contends, "that the sovereignty of the Czechoslovak State was violated." To say otherwise would be "a fiction, an untruth. And the violation was, in fact, of a flagrant nature."

"From a legal point of view, this cannot be justified. . . . Not the slightest trace of legality exists. Frankly, none whatever."

Castro argues that the sole justification for the invasion was political necessity. "In our opinion, the decision made concerning Czechoslovakia can only be explained from a political point of view, not from a legal point of view."

As he sees it, the political situation had become so alarming "that it was absolutely necessary, at all costs, in one way or another, to prevent this eventuality [the restoration of capitalism] from taking place."

"The essential point to be accepted, or not accepted," he insists, "is whether or not the socialist camp could allow a political situation to develop which would lead to the breaking away of a socialist country, to its falling into the arms of imperialism. And our point of view is that it is not permissible and that the socialist camp has a right to prevent this in one way or another. I would like to begin by making it clear that we look upon this fact as an essential one."

Castro puts up a strong case for dismissing the appeal of the unnamed "group of personalities" as immaterial. Is a certain embarrassment detectable in his stress on this point?

Only last January Anibal Escalante was put on trial for suggesting that the Kremlin intervene in Cuban affairs and utilize economic pressure to compel Fidel Castro to change his orientation. This was held to be a grave crime against Cuba's sovereignty, and Escalante was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Others in his group were sentenced to terms ranging from two to twelve years. (*Hansen lists reports in the US Trotskyist weekly Intercontinental Press, Feb. 23, March 1, and March 8 [pp. 158, 184, 202] on this matter – see also the pamphlet "Castro denounces sectarianism"*)

It would have been somewhat inconsistent of Castro to have considered the appeal of the Czechoslovak personalities to be legal while maintaining that the appeal of the Cuban personalities had been correctly condemned as illegal.

He could have argued that the Czechoslovak personalities were within their rights in making their appeal, for it was directed against the allegedly pro-capitalist Dubcek regime, whereas in the case of Cuba the appeal of the Escalante group was directed against the revolutionary regime of Fidel Castro. But this is a political argument, hinging on the political aims of the two groups — the appeal of the faceless Czechoslovaks being revolutionary, Escalante's appeal being counterrevolutionary.

This line of argument would have run into complications when it came to explaining why the appeals of such disparate groups were in each instance directed to the same address — the Kremlin. Why would both the criminal Escalante group and the heroic

Czechoslovak group each count on a favorable response from the Kremlin unless all three had something in common?

Castro avoided these quicksands by subordinating the issue of sovereignty to political necessity and frankly admitting that the action of the Warsaw Pact allies did not have the "slightest trace of legality."

Gus Hall Tells It Like It Is

Perhaps the Kremlin regretted that it had not been as outspoken as Castro on this point. The famous appeal of the discreet personalities turned into the opposite of what its originators had intended. It served to expose the fraudulent nature of their arguments.

To this day (November 17, 1968), the Warsaw Pact allies have felt it inadvisable to reveal the names of the signers. The ones to whom suspicion pointed denied any association. Thus, as no personalities, prominent or otherwise, stepped forward to claim the honor of having asked for foreign troops to be sent in, it became more and more evident that the population and the Communist party were solidly opposed to the intervention. Even the few in the regime willing to serve as puppets were afraid to identify themselves! Consequently, within a few days the Kremlin dropped all references to the appeal. (Emphasis by the Web Ed.)

But instead of acknowledging that a fraud had been perpetrated, the spokesmen of the Warsaw Pact sought to brazen it out.

Some quarters, secure in the knowledge that the re-imposed censorship prevents the Czechoslovak Communists from replying, are even arguing that the invasion was intended to safeguard the sovereignty of Czechoslovakia.

Thus Gus Hall, the general secretary of the CP USA, asks rhetorically in his pamphlet, *Czechoslovakia at the Crossroads*: "Does anyone really believe that the five powers were really violating national sovereignty?" They were, he contends, only protecting their own sovereignty. "The intervention," he adds, "is a temporary one." He caps this reasoning with the following assurance: "It will leave Czechoslovakia's sovereignty intact and able to defend itself."

This is reminiscent of the famous defense put up by the rapist when he was hauled into the frontier court. "First of all, Judge, does anyone really believe I am capable of really raping a defenseless woman? Secondly, I was only protecting my own virginity. Thirdly, it was only a temporary situation. And, last but not least, afterwards she still had her virginity intact and able to defend itself."

The fact is that Moscow prefers Gus Hall's reasoning to Fidel Castro's frankness. The Cuban leader's open recognition of the illegal nature of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia was highly embarrassing to those in charge of justifying the operation. That was one reason why they sought to dispose of the speech as quickly and as quietly as possible.

It would be interesting to know what the real thinking of the Cubans is now on this point. How could the Moscow leaders have come in the first place to use such a clumsy and fraudulent device as the appeal from anonymous persons? And why have they said nothing about arguments like those thought up by Gus Hall, maintaining that Czechoslovakia's sovereignty was preserved by the intervention?

Has Communism Lost Its Attraction?

More needs to be said about this issue, but let us first follow Castro's reasoning after he assumes as his basic premise the contention of the Warsaw Pact governments that Czechoslovakia had to be saved from going capitalist.

It is not enough, he says, to simply accept as a fact that "Czechoslovakia was headed toward a counterrevolutionary situation and that it was necessary to prevent it." Something more is required.

"We must analyze the causes," he continues, "and ask what factors made this possible and created the necessity for such a dramatic, drastic and painful measure." We must "analyze the causes, the factors and the circumstances" that brought about a situation leading a group of personalities "to appeal to other countries of the socialist camp to send their armies to prevent the triumph of the counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia and the triumph of the intrigues and conspiracies of the imperialist countries interested in tearing Czechoslovakia away from the community of socialist nations."

The question is of immense importance to Fidel Castro.

"Gentlemen," he continues, "is it conceivable that a situation could occur, under any circumstances, after 20 years of communism in our country, of communist revolution, of socialist revolution, in which a group of honest revolutionaries, in this country, horrified by the prospect of an advance — or rather a retrogression — to counterrevolutionary positions and toward imperialism, could find themselves obliged to request the aid of friendly armies to prevent such a retrogression from occurring? What would have happened to the communist conscience [consciousness] of this people? What would have happened to the revolutionary awareness of this people? To the dignity of this people? To the revolutionary morale of this people? If such a situation could arise some day, what would have happened to all those things which, for us, are the essentials of the Revolution?"

What Castro is saying here, with complete consistency, is that if you adopt the position that Czechoslovakia was about to fall like a ripe plum to capitalism, then you must draw certain conclusions about the attractive power of communism. How is it to be explained that capitalism has such an ideological grip on the people of Czechoslovakia? And not only after twenty years of living under a workers state in Czechoslovakia, but fifty-one years after the Russian October and ten years after the Cuban victory.

That's capitalism in its death agony, too. A capitalism that has given the world two global conflicts, a major depression and any number of minor ones. It is a capitalism that

has given the world fascism, and, in the case of Czechoslovakia, the Nazi occupation. A capitalism, moreover, that has already wiped out two cities with nuclear bombs and that threatens to destroy all mankind in a nuclear holocaust. A capitalism that has won universal hatred and contempt because of such aggressions as the current one in Vietnam. A capitalism that has aroused a mood of deep rebellion among the youth living under it. A capitalism which in the United States has touched off repeated explosions in the ghettos.

In the face of all this, the Kremlin is compelled to say — in deeds if not in words — that capitalism is more attractive to the people of Czechoslovakia than communism!

It is hard for Fidel Castro to accept that. It is hard for any revolutionist to accept it. Yet the conclusion is unavoidable if you admit the premise that the counterrevolutionary danger in Czechoslovakia was so great that foreign troops had to be sent in to crush it.

A completely opposite conclusion follows if the truth of the matter was that a political revolution was maturing in Czechoslovakia. For this signifies that instead of wanting to go back to capitalism, what the people of Czechoslovakia wanted was to go forward to socialist democracy. If that is the case, capitalism cannot possibly be restored in Czechoslovakia. The battle is with bureaucratism — the pattern of Stalinist bureaucratism imposed on the country from the outside.
(Emphasis by the Web Ed.)

Neglect of Communist Ideals

But let us follow Castro's reasoning further. He insists that "it behooves the communist movement as an unavoidable duty to undertake a profound study of the causes" that gave rise to the situation in Czechoslovakia.

The suggestion, again, is completely consistent. If such a glaring weakness has been uncovered, it would seem high time — fifty-one years after the victory of the Bolsheviks — to find out what went wrong and what might be done to remedy it. If the main strength of communism no longer lies in the power of its ideas and its example, but simply in the number and quality of its bayonets, then it is in a very dangerous position. Suppose that the men wielding the bayonets are likewise attracted by capitalism and begin welcoming it instead of battling it?

Every revolutionary socialist, one can be sure, will back Fidel Castro in pressing for a thorough analysis of the causes of the situation in Czechoslovakia. One can be just as sure that the Soviet bureaucracy will not prove responsive. The last thing Stalin's heirs want is a profound study of the causes of the situation in Czechoslovakia.

Another reason can be written down for the cool reception they gave Castro's speech.

Castro states that "this is not the time to make or pretend to make that profound analysis, but we can cite some facts and ideas." He lists these as "bureaucratic methods in the leadership of the country, lack of contact with the masses . . . neglect of communist ideals."

He deals in particular with the neglect of communist ideals, beginning with internationalism. "The communist ideal cannot, for a single moment, exist without internationalism," he says.

"Sell Any Old Junk"

Communist who are in power must not forget the rest of the world. "They can never forget the suffering, underdevelopment, poverty, ignorance and exploitation that exist in a part of the world or how much poverty and destitution have accumulated there."

A truly internationalist outlook cannot be instilled in the people if they are allowed to forget these realities and the danger represented by imperialism. It is wrong to attempt to move the masses "through material incentives and the promises of more consumer goods alone."

Castro continues: "We can say — and today it is necessary to speak clearly and frankly — that we have seen to what extent those ideals and those internationalist sentiments, that state of alertness and that awareness of the world's problems have disappeared or are very weakly expressed in certain socialist countries of Europe."

What Castro has in mind, evidently, is the help which the better-off "socialist" countries should give to the poorer ones and to revolutionary movements still struggling to achieve power. Later he reveals some scandalous examples of Cuba's experiences in this field.

"On many occasions they sold us very outdated factories." They were eager to "sell any old junk . . ." The Novotny regime sold weapons to Cuba that were the "spoils of war seized from the Nazis, weapons for which we have been paying, and still today are paying for . . ." The Tito regime (of Yugoslavia) even refused to sell arms to revolutionary Cuba although it offered them to Batista.

This is a very telling point. The leaders of the Warsaw Pact must have squirmed a bit over the public exposure. Perhaps that was when they decided to throw the document in the wastebasket.

Was Castro Consulted on Invasion?

Castro could have said much more, however, under the heading of "internationalism." Even in its economic aspects he confines himself largely to the question of international solidarity in meeting the imperialist enemy and in dealing with underdeveloped countries. He leaves out completely how the parasitic economic interests of the bureaucracy affect international cooperation and interfere with correctly solving such problems as achieving the optimum ratios in the production of the various kinds of goods.

Castro's reticence on the political aspects of internationalism is even more striking. Where is internationalism best exemplified if not in trying to reach joint solutions to the

common political problems facing the workers movement, particularly in confronting imperialism?

But what international body, set up in accordance with the rules of democratic centralism, took up the problem of the drift in Czechoslovakia toward an alleged counterrevolutionary situation? What international body, composed of representatives of all the socialist countries, decided that no other solution was possible save a surprise invasion consisting in the main of Soviet troops?

Was Castro, for instance, asked for his views or for suggestions as to possible alternatives? Was he even notified in advance? Or was he merely told about the action after it had occurred?

All the evidence indicates that the decision was reached secretly by top bureaucrats in Moscow who preferred to remain anonymous. To this day, it is not known if some of those participating behind closed doors in these secret councils were opposed or if the decision was unanimous. Everyone else in the "socialist camp" was required to step forward after the event and be counted publicly for or against, a position hardly in accord with the dignity of communist man. And criticisms were not given much of a hearing, as we can see from the way Castro's speech was received.

"Peaceful Coexistence"

Another practice of "certain socialist countries of Europe" which Castro condemns is "the preaching of peace." He, of course — as he patiently explains — is not advocating war. "We are not the enemies of peace; we are not in favor of wars; we do not advocate universal holocaust." But he thinks it is wrong to keep crying, peace, peace, when there is no peace. "And those realities cannot be changed by simply preaching, in one's own house, an excessive desire for peace."

If peace must be preached, let it be done in the enemy's camp and not in one's own camp.

What Castro is attacking here, without nailing it down, is the concept of "peaceful coexistence" peddled by the Kremlin which plays into the hands of imperialism and which has led to disaster after disaster for the working class internationally.

A free discussion on this policy and its consequences would be highly useful, particularly "in certain socialist countries in Europe," above all the Soviet Union. But free discussions in those countries on such topics is taboo. That is why Castro's speech seems not to have been cleared by the "socialist" censors.

What About the Soviet Union?

Some of Castro's sharpest criticisms refer directly to the Soviet Union. He says, for instance: "We are against all those bourgeois liberal reforms within Czechoslovakia. But we are also against the liberal economic reforms . . . that have been taking place in other

countries of the socialist camp, as well." Quoting from an article in *Pravda*, assailing an alleged tendency to introduce "mercantile relations" and "granting a broad field of action to private capital," Castro asks:

"Does this, by chance, mean that the Soviet Union is also going to curb certain currents in the field of economy that are in favor of putting increasingly greater emphasis on mercantile relations and on the effects of spontaneity in those relations, and those which have even been defending the desirability of the market and the beneficial effect of prices based on that market? Does it mean that the Soviet Union is becoming aware of the need to halt those currents? More than one article in the imperialist press has referred jubilantly to those currents that also exist within the Soviet Union."

This is not the place to debate whether the "economic reforms" in either Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union point in the direction of a capitalist restoration. I think it can be shown that they do not transcend the limits of bureaucratic planning, whatever dangers that kind of planning may hold in general for the Soviet economy. What is to be noted here is Castro's consistency.

If the "liberal" economic reforms paved the way in Czechoslovakia for a counterrevolutionary situation, then the same holds true for the Soviet Union. And if the leaders of the Soviet Union are concerned about what happened in Czechoslovakia, they should be all the more concerned about what is happening under their noses in the Soviet Union.

Implicit in Castro's argumentation is the question: If the analysis of the trend in Czechoslovakia was accurate, then must it not be concluded that a counterrevolutionary situation is being fostered in the Soviet Union? (Web Ed.)

Moscow Fails to Name U. S. Imperialism

An even more cutting criticism concerns Moscow's relations with Washington.

"It disturbs us," he says, "that, so far, there has been no direct imputation against Yankee imperialism in any of the statements made by the countries that sent their divisions to Czechoslovakia, or in the explanation of the events. We have been informed exhaustively concerning all the preceding events, all the facts, all the deviations, all about that rightist group, all about that liberal group; we have been informed of their activities.

"The activities of the imperialists and the intrigues of the imperialists are known, and we are disturbed to see that neither the Communist Party nor the Government of the Soviet Union, nor the governments of the other countries that sent their troops to Czechoslovakia, have made any direct accusation against Yankee imperialism for its responsibility in the events in Czechoslovakia."

Castro emphasizes this important point:

"Certain vague references to world imperialism, to world imperialist circles, and some more concrete statements concerning the imperialist circles of West Germany

have been made. But who doesn't know that West Germany is simply a pawn of Yankee imperialism in Europe, the most aggressive, the most obvious pawn — that it is a pawn of the CIA, a pawn of the Pentagon and a pawn of the imperialist Government of the United States? And, certainly, we wish to express our concern over the fact that in none of the statements is a direct imputation made against Yankee imperialism, which is the principal culprit in the world plot and conspiracy against the socialist camp. And it is necessary that we express this preoccupation."

Castro made his speech just two days after the invasion. Almost three months have passed; yet this telling criticism has not been met.

In fact, the Soviet leaders have followed the opposite course. They have gone out of their way to display their friendliness to Washington. State Department officials, invited to talk with the Soviet diplomats, have leaked to the press that the Brezhnev-Kosygin team were anxious to assure the Johnson administration that there was no reason for the events in Czechoslovakia to alter the present detente in relations, since the invasion was intended only to normalize a family matter in the Soviet sphere of influence. The State Department and the White House, no doubt having in mind the need to normalize some family problems in the Western Hemisphere, indicated how well they understood Moscow's position.

In light of the record, it would seem difficult to avoid reaching the following conclusions:

- 1) There was no counterrevolutionary situation in Czechoslovakia engineered by the U.S., no matter what irons the CIA may have tried to heat in the fire.
- 2) Due to domestic ferment, the country was heading toward a political revolution and the establishment of socialist democracy. (*Emphasis by the Web Ed.*)
- 3) Washington understood this and also understood the fear in Moscow, which it was not beyond sharing to some extent, over this perspective.
- 4) Washington indicated in advance that it would not react in a genuinely hostile way to any action undertaken by Moscow to normalize the situation, whatever propaganda value the imperialist communications media might try to squeeze out of it or whatever declarations officials of the Johnson administration might have to make for the record.
- 5) Castro's allusions to this subject irritated Moscow since they put in question its policy of maintaining "peaceful coexistence"; i.e., collaborating with U.S. imperialism to maintain the status quo. Hence the decision to give Castro's criticisms the silent treatment.

The Payoff in Latin America

At the conference of the Organization of Latin-American Solidarity in Havana last year, Castro criticized the Soviet policy of dealing with the tyrannical governments of the oligarchies in Latin America in face of their participation in the U. S. blockade of

revolutionary Cuba. He raises the question again in his speech on the events in Czechoslovakia.

"It is understandable," he declares, "that the countries of the Warsaw Pact sent their armies to destroy the imperialist conspiracy and the progress of the counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia. However, we have disagreed with, been displeased at, and protested against the fact that these same countries have been drawing closer economically, culturally and politically to the oligarchic governments of Latin America, which are not merely reactionary governments and exploiters of their peoples, but also shameless accomplices in the imperialist aggressions against Cuba and shameless accomplices in the economic blockade of Cuba. And these countries have been encouraged and emboldened by the fact that our friends, our natural allies, have ignored the vile and treacherous role enacted by those governments against a socialist country.

"And at the same time that we understand the need for the spirit of internationalism, and the need to go to the aid — even with troops — of a fraternal country to confront the schemes of the imperialists, we ask ourselves if that policy of economic, political and cultural rapprochement toward those oligarchic governments that are accomplices in the imperialist blockade against Cuba will come to an end."

To drive his point home, Castro quotes dispatches from various cities in Latin America indicating that all these reactionary governments and their press were extracting everything possible out of the events in Czechoslovakia and shaking their fists at the Soviet Union. In the case of Venezuela, what a contrast between the attitude of the reactionaries in the government when the U. S. invaded the Dominican Republic and their attitude in the case of Czechoslovakia. In the former instance, "No relations were broken, no business was shelved, no economic relations were disturbed — nothing at all like this happened. And now they permit themselves the luxury of throwing in the face of the countries of the socialist camp this type of relations which the latter have actually been begging them for, this type of relations which they have been begging that government, which is one of the most reactionary and dyed-in-the-wool of the accomplices of Yankee imperialism. And now they throw it in the faces of the socialist countries.

"These are the results of such a policy when the chips are down, at the moment of truth."

One wonders what Castro's basic thinking is about the Soviet bureaucracy. Does he believe that it will really listen to reason, that it can be reformed by pointing out some of the disastrous consequences of its reactionary policies? In any case, he is consistent in maintaining that if they have turned over a new leaf in Czechoslovakia, then they ought to do likewise in a number of other areas, including their attempts to woo the Latin-American oligarchies.

The Right-Wing CP Leaderships

In passing, Castro lashes the Communist parties of Europe, caught up in "indecision" at the moment. "And we wonder whether possibly in the future the relations with Communist Parties will be based on principled positions or whether they will continue to

maintain a spineless attitude, to be satellites, lackeys —a situation in which only those that maintain a spineless attitude, say 'yes' to everything and never assume an independent position on anything, would be considered friendly."

He contrasts the principled attitude of the Cuban Communist party which backed the Venezuelan, Bolivian, and Guatemalan guerrillas when they were abandoned by a "rightist and treacherous leadership." "Yet we were accused of being adventurers, of interfering in the affairs of other countries, of interfering in the affairs of other Parties."

"I ask myself, in the light of the facts and in the light of the bitter reality that persuaded the nations of the Warsaw Pact to send then-forces to crush the counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia, and — according to their statement — to back a minority in the face of a majority with rightist positions, if they will also cease to support these rightist, reformist, sold-out, submissive leaderships in Latin America that are enemies of the armed revolutionary struggle, that oppose the peoples' liberation struggle.

"And, with the example of this bitter experience before them, I wonder whether or not the Parties of those countries, in line with the decision made in Czechoslovakia, will cease to support those rightist groups that betray the revolutionary movement in Latin America."

It can be seen how logical Castro is. All kinds of accusations were leveled at the Cubans because they backed minority groups of revolutionary guerrillas against Communist party leaders who betrayed. The Cubans were even accused — crime of crimes! — of intervening in the internal affairs of other countries and other parties. *(Emphasis by the Web Ed.)*

Yet, lo and behold, the Warsaw Pact allies sent more than 600,000 troops to intervene in the internal affairs of another country and another Communist party, the reason being that a minority there had appealed for help. Isn't an apology due the Cubans? And if the apology is skipped, shouldn't the Warsaw Pact governments, in all consistency, change their line by about 180 degrees in Latin America?

A broad discussion in Czechoslovakia on this point would have helped a great deal to bring clarity into the situation there. But clarity is not exactly what Moscow wants in Czechoslovakia.

The Cost of Appeasing Imperialism

All this is preliminary to one of the sharpest juxtapositions yet to be made by Castro between the revolutionary principles on which the Cubans stand and the line of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism followed by the Kremlin.

"Certainly," declares Castro, "we do not believe in the possibility of an improvement in relations between the socialist camp and imperialism under the present conditions, or under any conditions as long as that imperialism exists. We do not and cannot believe in the possibility of an improvement in relations between the socialist camp and the U. S. imperialist Government as long as that country performs the role of international

gendarme, aggressor against the peoples and enemy and systematic opponent of revolutions everywhere in the world. Much less can we believe in any such improvement in the midst of an aggression as criminal and cowardly as that being waged against Vietnam.

"Our position on this is very clear: one is consistent with world realities and is truly internationalist and genuinely and decidedly supports the revolutionary movement throughout the world, in which case relations with the imperialist Government of the United States cannot be improved, or relations with the imperialist U. S. Government will improve, but only at the cost of withholding consistent support from the worldwide revolutionary movement."

The Nuclear Monopolists

Castro's target is absolutely clear. However, he does not leave it at this abstract level. He gets down to cases.

He cites a dispatch from Washington dated August 22 reporting a declaration by Secretary of State Dean Rusk that the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia compromises any improvement in relations between East and West and that the situation could block ratification of the Non-Proliferation Treaty by the U. S. Senate.

"This can hardly fail to delight us," Castro declares. "Our people know the position of the Cuban delegation regarding this famous Non-Proliferation Treaty, which virtually gives a permanent concession to the large powers for the monopoly of nuclear weapons and the monopoly of technology in a field of energy that is going to be indispensable to the future of mankind. (*This written before the Soviet Chernoble disaster –Ed.*) We were concerned, above all, by the fact that many countries of the world, including our own, would be obliged to accept the U. S. imperialist Government's monopoly on those weapons, which could be used at any moment against any people, particularly in view of the fact that the proposed treaty was also accompanied by an astonishing declaration concerning the defense of the signatory nations that might be threatened with nuclear weapons. Such countries as Vietnam, countries such as Cuba, that did not choose to accept that type of treaty, and much less sign it in a situation in which the aggression against Vietnam is being constantly intensified, are left outside the realm of any protection, and thus fall into the category in which the imperialists would theoretically have the right to attack us with nuclear arms. And, of course, everyone knows our position."

The final reference here, no doubt, is to the famous 1962 Caribbean crisis in which the Cubans accepted the placement of defensive nuclear weapons in order to deter Washington from attempting another Bay of Pigs invasion. Khrushchev's withdrawal of the weapons without consultation was bitterly resented by the Cuban government.

Since the Non-Proliferation Treaty was directed primarily against China, Castro's remarks on this point were undoubtedly read with interest in Peking. In fact, the following paragraph in Castro's speech coincides quite closely with Peking's position:

"In view of the facts, in the face of an imperialism that is always plotting, always conspiring against the socialist camp, we ask ourselves whether or not the idyllic hopes of an improvement in relations with the imperialist Government of the United States will continue to be maintained. We ask ourselves if, consistent with events in Czechoslovakia, a position may be adopted that will imply a renunciation of such idyllic hopes in relation to Yankee imperialism. And the dispatch states that an improvement in relations will be compromised and that there is the danger of non-ratification of the treaty. In our opinion, that would be the best thing that could happen."

This is a stinging slap at Moscow's policy of trying to placate U.S. imperialism at the expense of the overall interests of the "socialist camp." However, it should not be concluded from this that Castro is preparing to join the cult of Mao. He is voicing independent, revolutionary opposition to the joint efforts of Moscow and Washington to maintain the status quo.

What About Help for Vietnam?

Castro scores even more directly and tellingly on the question of supporting the Vietnamese revolution against the U. S. aggression:

"The TASS statement explaining the decision of the Warsaw Pact governments states in its concluding paragraph: 'The fraternal countries firmly and resolutely offer their unbreakable solidarity against any outside threat. They will never permit anyone to tear away even one link of the community of socialist States.' And we ask ourselves: 'Does that declaration include Vietnam? Does that statement include Korea? Does that statement include Cuba? Do they or do they not consider Vietnam, Korea and Cuba links of the socialist camp to be safeguarded against the imperialists?'

"In accordance with that declaration, Warsaw Pact divisions were sent into Czechoslovakia. And we ask ourselves: 'Will Warsaw Pact divisions also be sent to Vietnam if the Yankee imperialists step up their aggression against that country and the people of Vietnam request that aid?! Will they send the divisions of the Warsaw Pact to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea if the Yankee imperialists attack that country? Will they send the divisions of the Warsaw Pact to Cuba if the Yankee imperialists attack our country, or even in the case of the threat of a Yankee imperialist attack on our country, if our country requests it?'"

When Johnson first escalated the war in Vietnam, Castro, it will be recalled, appealed at once for a massive response to the imperialist aggression. His appeal was not heeded by either Moscow or Peking.

The Cubans themselves redoubled their efforts to help Vietnam by opening up new revolutionary fronts in Latin America. This was one of Che Guevara's declared aims in starting a guerrilla struggle in Bolivia. Through the right-wing Communist party leaders under its control, the Kremlin blocked these attempts.

But in Czechoslovakia, seeming to become alert all at once to a counter-revolutionary danger, the Kremlin, with extraordinary haste, mobilized and sent into immediate action 600,000 or more troops.

"We acknowledge the bitter necessity that called for the sending of those forces into Czechoslovakia; we do not condemn the socialist countries that made that decision," Castro declares. "But we, as revolutionaries, and proceeding from positions of principle, do have the right to demand that they adopt a consistent position with regard to all the other questions that affect the world revolutionary movement."

Castro sounds almost ironic. The irony, however, is probably unintentional. He is convinced that basically the Kremlin is motivated by revolutionary aims. He hopes that it will respond to the power of reason and undertake to reform itself.

However, this hope is not realistic. It is a mistake to think that the basic flaw in the Kremlin's policies is inconsistency. Something more difficult to rectify sets the Kremlin's course. This something is the material interests of the Soviet bureaucracy as a parasitic caste. The needs of the bureaucracy do not happen to be the same as the needs of the world revolution. In fact, most often they are antagonistic to those needs.

National Sovereignty and World Revolution

That Castro seeks to subordinate all other political considerations to the needs of the world revolution is shown by the fashion in which he weighs the relative importance of Czechoslovakia's national sovereignty.

For Cubans, the question is especially important, he says. They have had to face the problem of intervention throughout their history. Thus "it is logical that many would react emotionally in the face of the fact that armies from outside the nation's borders had to come in to prevent a catastrophe." Castro is referring here to the widespread sympathy in Cuba for the Czechoslovaks.

"And since, logically, for various reasons," he continues, "our conscience [consciousness] has been shaped by the concept of repudiating such deeds, only the development of the political awareness of our people will make it possible for them to determine when such an action becomes necessary and when it is necessary to accept it even in spite of the fact that it violates rights such as the right of sovereignty which — in this case, in our opinion — must give way before the most important interests of the world revolutionary movement and the struggle of the peoples against the imperialists, which as we see it, is the basic question. And, undoubtedly, the breaking away of Czechoslovakia and its falling into the arms of imperialism would have been a rude blow, an even harder blow to the interests of the worldwide revolutionary movement."

He concludes this point with the general assertion: "We must learn to analyze these truths and to determine when one interest must give way before other interests in order not to fall into romantic or idealistic positions that are out of touch with reality."

This is the source of Castro's consistency — he subordinates all other interests to the interest of the world revolution. Paradoxically this also happens to point directly

to the weakest point in Castro's position. Where does the question of socialist democracy stand in relation to the interests of the world revolution? (*Emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

Does Socialism Reject Democracy in General?

Castro deals hardly at all with democracy in his speech. As for **socialist** democracy, the blunt fact is that he does not even mention it.

If anything, he indicates a bias against democracy. Thus he states that in Czechoslovakia a "real liberal fury was unleashed; a whole series of political slogans in favor of the formation of opposition parties began to develop, in favor of openly anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist theses . . . " He states again: "A series of slogans began to be put forward, and in fact certain measures were taken such as the establishment of a bourgeois form of 'freedom' of the press. This means that the counterrevolution and the exploiters, the very enemies of socialism, were granted the right to speak and write freely against socialism."

What was really developing in Czechoslovakia, all the weight of the evidence shows, was a powerful proletarian current demanding the right to speak out against a stifling bureaucratic regime, the right to form independent *communist* political groupings as in Lenin's time, and the right to institute socialist democracy in Czechoslovakia. This is not the same as a "bourgeois form" of democracy. (*Emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

One wonders if it was not on this question that Castro was led into misjudging what was happening in Czechoslovakia. In the opening of his speech, he says:

"A process of what was termed democratization began. The imperialist press invented another word, the word 'liberalization,' and began to differentiate between progressives and conservatives — calling progressive those who supported a whole series of political reforms, and conservatives the supporters of the former leadership. It was evident — and we must give our opinion about both: the conservatives and the liberals. . . . It rather reminds us of the past history of Cuba, that division between conservatives and liberals, a situation which, of course, was not to be expected in the political processes of socialist revolutions."

If we have understood Castro correctly, he believes that the aim of the democratizers in Czechoslovakia was to introduce dirty machine politics and petty "politicking" such as Cuba knew before the revolution. And, if we are not mistaken, he considers shallow, miserable politics of this type to be the "bourgeois form" of democracy.

Now there is absolutely no doubt about the mean, trivial and fraudulent nature of bourgeois democracy in the political arena in prerevolutionary Cuba, and, for that matter, throughout the rest of the capitalist world today. But the question of "bourgeois forms" of democracy is not exhausted by this fact.

The question is much broader. In reality it involves some of the profoundest theoretical and political problems of the world revolution today and the connection of these problems with the heritage of previous revolutions.

Marxism does not reject the conquests of previous revolutions, such as the winning of democracy by the bourgeois revolution against feudalism. Marxism defends these conquests, seeks to deepen and develop them, to supersede, not do away with them.

Thus the Marxist appreciation of bourgeois democracy is that it represented an enormous gain for humanity, one of the great achievements of the revolutions of the past. The Marxist criticism of bourgeois democracy is that it remained limited; it did not go far enough. (*Emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

One of the main charges leveled by the revolutionary Marxist movement against the capitalist system today concerns its tendency, as it exhausts all the progressive features of its earlier stages, to narrow down, pinch off and reduce democracy in the political arena as well as elsewhere to an empty shell.

The culmination of this tendency is fascism; that is, a reversion to utter barbarism. As against fascism, revolutionists are duty bound — independently and with their own methods — to defend bourgeois democracy with all their strength. Not to do so is suicidal. (*Emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

Even more than this is involved. Taking bourgeois democracy as a conquest of previous revolutions, the program of Marxism calls for expanding it into proletarian democracy, spreading democracy from its limited area of application under the bourgeoisie in their best days to the entire economic and social system, right down to the factory level. This is the key thought developed by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, where he also considers the problem of how this is to be accomplished.

As we can see from his speech, Castro is well aware of the significance and importance of national sovereignty. What is national sovereignty but one of the forms of bourgeois democracy? As soon as we view national sovereignty from this angle, we at once see the limitations of the bourgeoisie of today as either a revolutionary or progressive force. In the underdeveloped regions, the bourgeoisie are no longer capable of achieving it in a genuine sense. They came on the scene too late. In the advanced sectors, the bourgeoisie, having reached the imperialist stage, systematically violate it. The dialectic of history has thus conferred on the proletariat the achievement or defense of national sovereignty. The situation in Vietnam today offers an almost perfect example.

Lenin was the first to grasp the political importance of this and to inscribe the right of self-determination in the program of the Bolsheviks.

The victory of the Bolshevik revolution did not settle the question even for the workers state established under Lenin. The right of self-determination includes the right to secede from a federation like the Soviet Union. For a socialist state to stand outside this federation does not necessarily signify a catastrophe. This is shown in the cases of China, Korea, Vietnam, and . . . Cuba. In principle, why shouldn't any of the East European

countries feel free to stand as independently of the Soviet Union as say Cuba? Why shouldn't this likewise hold for any of the republics of the USSR?

The truth is that exercising this democratic right would greatly strengthen the socialist camp. The experience with Cuba is living proof of this. (*Emphasis Web Ed.*)

However, the question was not posed on this level in Czechoslovakia. There is no evidence that the workers, or the ranks of the Communist party, or the bulk of Novotny's Communist opponents in the government wanted to sever relations with the Soviet Union, or the Warsaw Pact, or even to stand as independently as Cuba. **What they wanted, concretely, was socialist democracy inside the country.**

We come to the decisive question: Was it not in the interests of the world revolution to establish socialist democracy in Czechoslovakia? (*Emphasis Web Ed.*)

Socialist Democracy and World Revolution

Castro speaks depreciatively of people who are preoccupied over intellectual and artistic freedom and similar issues although he grants that they have a point and that there have been abuses. But such interests are not of great concern to the masses of humanity living under imperialist oppression and neocolonialism.

"And for the thousands of millions of human beings who, for all intents and purposes, are living without hope under conditions of starvation and extreme want," he says, "there are questions in which they are more interested than the problem of whether or not to let their hair grow. This might be a very controversial issue, but these are not the things that are worrying people who are faced with the problem of whether or not they will have the possibility or hope of eating."

This is very true. People faced with starvation are not inclined to be concerned about abstract democratic rights. This, however, hardly disposes of the problem. These same people may become highly interested in national independence, in a radical agrarian reform, in social equality, free education and similar issues that belong historically to the bourgeois revolution and its democratic tasks.

It is true, moreover, that in seeking a way out of the abyss of misery and hunger to which they have been sentenced, they have accepted the models provided by the Soviet Union, China, and now Cuba. They know they do not need to follow the slow path of development charted by the highly developed capitalist countries. Instead of centuries, industrialization can be achieved in decades under a planned economy. If this requires foregoing democracy, they are prepared to pay the price, a decision reached all the easier in view of its virtual nonexistence anyway in their part of the world.

However, things are altogether different in the imperialist sector — which is also involved in the world revolution. The imperialist sector, if we may state an elementary truth, is of crucial importance in the development of the world revolution. Great as the victories have been elsewhere up to now, the final, and we may believe the biggest and

most bitterly contested battles will be fought there. Consequently, in weighing the interests of the world revolution, it is absolutely essential to take into account the problems faced by the revolutionary Marxists in the heartlands of the capitalist system. The ultimate victory hinges on this.

In the imperialist sector, the issue of democratic rights is of key significance. Having won these rights in immense and often bloody battles in the past, the masses are not inclined to give them up readily. They are inclined instead to defend them. They can easily understand the virtue of deepening and extending them or trying to win them where they have not already been gained. The current student struggles in various imperialist countries and the black freedom struggle in the United States are cases in point.

The problem for revolutionary Marxists in these countries is to find ways and means of converting these struggles into struggles for socialism. This cannot possibly be done if the masses believe that socialism signifies taking away what they have already achieved.

The greatest single obstacle to a socialist victory in Western Europe and the United States for decades has been the treacherous role played by leaderships committed to Stalinism; and, in particular, the totalitarian image conferred on socialism and communism by the practices of Stalin and his heirs.

The purges, the frame-up trials, the forced confessions, the deportations, the labor camps, the liquidation of all political opposition, the suppression of all free thought in politics, the schools, art, and even some of the sciences — horrors such as these, which became common knowledge in the West despite Stalin's censorship and the dithyrambs of his retainers, dupes and sycophants, made the task of building a revolutionary socialist movement in the advanced capitalist sectors almost insuperable up to recent years.

The reversion of the Soviet Union to a **pre-capitalist** level so far as democratic rights were concerned was pictured by the bourgeois spokesmen as synonymous with socialism. And this propaganda — ably assisted by the cult of Stalin and the dictator's claim to be the incarnation of socialist wisdom — gained widespread acceptance among the masses.

If there is one thing needed to counteract this lie of socialism and Stalinism being one and the same thing, it is an example of socialist democracy in practice.

Signs in That Direction

The Twentieth Congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union aroused hopes among some circles that this marked the beginning of a process that would soon lead to the reestablishment of socialist democracy in the Soviet Union itself. The hope proved illusory because the bureaucratic caste which Stalin represented still remained in power. The “de-Stalinization” consisted of concessions designed to relieve social tensions to better to maintain the rule of the parasitic bureaucracy. The bureaucrats have not hesitated to tighten the screws again when they deemed this advisable.

The proletarian upsurge in Poland in 1956 gave hopes of the appearance of socialist democracy there. The upsurge was contained and its energy drained away and the hopes died.

The proletarian uprising in Hungary in 1956 was even more promising. It was crushed with tanks.

One of the reasons for the great response to the Cuban revolution, particularly among the youth in the United States, was precisely the impression that it favored the development of socialist democracy. The way Havana became a crossroads for all kinds of revolutionary tendencies, the free reign given to artists, the welcome extended to intellectuals of many hues, the rebuff given the bureaucratic tendency headed by Escalante — all this gave an immensely favorable impression not only of revolutionary Cuba but of socialism in general. (*Emphasis by the Web Ed.*)

It must be said, however, that the development of this tendency in the political and governmental arena has not flowered and this has prevented Cuba from serving as a model of socialist democracy.

Could Czechoslovakia have moved into this position? There is every reason to believe that this would have been possible if the Kremlin had kept its hands off. That, of course, was precisely why the Kremlin ordered the invasion. The example of a working socialist democracy in Czechoslovakia would have been altogether too contagious for the workers of the East European countries and the Soviet Union. The fate of the bureaucratic ruling caste was at stake.

But from the viewpoint of the interests of the world revolution, the establishment of socialist democracy in Czechoslovakia would most likely have marked a point of qualitative change for the advance of the socialist revolution in the imperialist sectors.

That is why, so far as the world revolution is concerned, the invasion of Czechoslovakia was one of the worst crimes ever committed by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

It is to be regretted that Castro does not see this. Perhaps he will come to this view as more facts accumulate and it becomes increasingly difficult for the Kremlin to cover up the real reasons for the invasion and occupation.

At the same time, Fidel Castro's criticisms of the policies of the Kremlin deserve the closest attention. Every revolutionist will surely do everything possible to help circulate them where they will do the most good.

(End)

(The in-depth, profound theoretical analysis displayed in this document indicates the collaboration of SWP leadership, especially its theoretical leader George Novack, in its composition — Web Ed.)